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EPA Seeks Comment on Title VI Proposal

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EPA today released for public comment combined draft civil rights and environmental protection guidance in its effort to protect public health and economic progress while ensuring that pollution does not unfairly and disproportionately affect minority communities.

The guidance released today comes under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and EPA's Title VI regulations. Title VI bars intentional discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in all programs or activities that receive federal funding. EPA and all other federal agencies are required to adopt and enforce regulations to ensure against discrimination. EPA's Title VI regulations prohibit actions that either intentionally discriminate or have the effect of discriminating.

Like every community in America, minority communities want and deserve water that is safe to drink, lakes and rivers safe for fishing and swimming, air that is healthy to breathe and land free from toxic waste – as well as good jobs. When some minority communities believe they have been disproportionately affected by pollution because of their race, EPA has a legal responsibility to address those complaints on their merits in a fair and timely manner.

EPA's experience with Title VI and other areas has proven that robust economic growth and strong environmental protections – and protections of civil rights -- go hand in hand. The guidance announced today provides a means for opening up a dialogue among members from all parts of a community – both business and community leaders – so that they can work together on common solutions to grievances and serve the entire community. EPA believes that if people have the opportunity to sit down together and listen to one another, common-sense, cost-effective solutions that work for everyone can be obtained.

Today's draft proposal, on which EPA will take comment for 60 days, is the result of extensive public discussions, including more than a hundred individual citizen comments, wide-reaching consultation with state and local officials and stakeholders, and a series of discussions with a specially-formed 23-member Title VI Advisory Committee.

The draft guidance is contained in two documents, *Draft Recipient Guidance* and *Draft Revised Investigations Guidance*.

The *Draft Recipient Guidance* is designed specifically to help recipients of federal funds address their Title VI responsibilities. Prepared at the request of states, this guidance helps recipients address situations that might result in the filing of complaints alleging violations of Title VI. The *Draft Revised Investigation Guidance* provides a framework for EPA's Office of Civil Rights to process complaints of discrimination filed under Title VI. It sets forth a clear and detailed explanation of the way EPA's Office of Civil Rights will process Title VI complaints.

Taken together, the new guidance reaffirms EPA's commitment to enforcing both environmental and civil rights laws. It provides a blueprint for community and business leaders to work together alongside state and local governments to develop new efforts to reduce clear environmental impacts when they plainly violate the civil rights of minority communities.

The guidance is available on the EPA website at <http://www.epa.gov/civilrights>.